DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 841 UD 028 543

AUTHOR Steele, R.
TITLE Mentoring: An Effective Tool for Retention of Minorities.
PUB DATE Oct 91
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; Black Education; *College Students; Collegiality; *Education Majors; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; *Mentors; *Minority Groups; Minority Group Teachers; *Professional Development; School Holding Power; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

Mentoring is an effective tool for retaining minorities who are in higher education and on the path to productive careers. Within business organizations, the link between mentoring and career advancement is widely acknowledged. The stages of mentoring functions include the following: (1) teaching techniques in a guided apprenticeship; (2) counseling, supporting, and introducing the protege to key people; (3) intervening with influence; and (4) recommending and sponsoring the protege for positions. Within higher education, current data seem to indicate a positive relationship between the numbers of black faculty at predominantly white institutions and recruitment, admissions, and graduation rates of black students. However, on many campuses, the gap between admission rates for minorities and graduation rates may be due to the lack of real support during the college experience. In addition, aspects of the minority experience in graduate education may have negative consequences for career development if students are not included in collaborative socialization with faculty. Such experience can be key to later career development. A survey of students on a campus integrated since 1960 found that minority faculty were involved with students and visible on campus only to a very low degree. It is concluded that mentoring may make a real difference to minority students. Included are one table and seven references. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED342841

MENTORING: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR RETENTION OF MINORITIES

R. Steele

Introduction

Mentoring is a slippery and elusive concept. As derived from Greek mythology the term implies a relationship between a young person and someone older and more experienced who helps the younger person navigate the paths of personal and professional development. Much of the literature on mentoring relates to men and business, but as women get further in the work place they become aware of the values of mentoring. In the frequently cited study of adult male development by Levison (1978) he held that the most crucial function of the true mentor is to foster the younger person's development by believing in them, sharing the youthful dream, and giving it his blessing. The mentor facilitates the process of defining oneself in a new world by making a space where the protege can work in a life structure where the dream can flourish.

As society has become more complex and demanding there is greater need for the educated and skilled. Preparing a multicultural workforce for the 21st century is a daunting task. Minorities need sound strategies to help them prepare and mentoring is receiving more attention as a tool toward that end. In addition to the work by Levinson there have been other studies, with sample populations other than White males. They have shown enough about the benefits of mentoring to indicate that it could be used effectively to increase minority student retention. There are models in place that have reported impressive success rates for higher education.

Within business organizations the link between mentoring and career advancement is widely acknowledged. There is, however, little hard data on the extent of it. An often quoted article from Harvard Business Review (Collins 1979) made the point that everyone who makes it has a mentor.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. STEELE
SOUTHEAST MO.U.
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SP 028 543

Articles such as that offer strong anecdotal support to the suggestion that the guidance and support of a mentor is just as important as what one knows.

There are aspects of the mentoring relationships that are difficult to quantify. Certainly this phenomenon warrants scholarly investigation (Hagerty 1986). There are, however, some functions of the process that have been shown to be effective tools in the recruitment and retention of minorities (Frierson 1987, Allen, Steele 1989).

Historically there are well known mentor-protege dyads: Franz Haydn and Ludwig Van Beethoven; Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud; Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung; Franz Boas and Margaret Mead, Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale. One of the earliest recorded mentor-protege relationships involved Plato and Aristotle. Young Aristotle constantly questioned his teacher Plato and disagreed with him often. As Plato raised important questions, Aristotle gave clearer answers. He became one of the most innovative thinkers and teachers of the Western world. Had Plato been an insecure mentor who felt threatened by a brilliant protege the outcome would have been different.

On a developmental continuum career progression is sequential. People and organizations require different things at different points along that continuum. A mentoring hierarchy speaks to an age/stage relationship wherein certain things are more appropriate at different points. Although there are general functions that assist the protege, they are not all of equal value. Nor do they require equal expenditure from the mentor; from first acquaintance to the type of success that prepares one to mentor others.

Table of Stages of Mentoring Functions

	Mentor		Protege
Level 1	Teaches Techniques in Guided Apprenticeship	Time	Gains Relevant Information Has Role Model
Level 2	Counsels/Supports Introduces to Key People	Emotional Self	Acceptance by Association with Mentor Self Confidence and Competence Increases
Level 3	Intervenes with Influence	Reputation with Peers	Collaboration, Partial Responsibility
Level 4	Recommends and Sponsors for Positions	Credibility Own Career	Confidence in Ability to Mentor Others

Early on the mentor helps the protege to perform his job better, expand this knowledge, and learn the subtleties of organizational survival. Closely related to the teaching function are counseling and personal support. At this point the protege needs his dream blessed, his competence validated, his courage reinforced. In addition to time the mentor gives of himself in an intense emotional investment. Soon the mentor will expend his personal capital by actively intervening on behalf of the protege. As he speaks for the protege's ability he protects from outside pressures that might be overwhelming or destructive.

Sponsoring represents the greatest mentor investment. By helping the protege move along he proclaims his faith and belief in his potential. This is not without risk since it speaks to the mentor's judgement (Zey 1984).

Benefits to the mentor include the satisfaction that comes with life review and knowing that someone has been helped to succeed. In return for a mentor's support the protege helps the mentor do his work by providing

information, loyalty and active support. The organization or institution gains a well prepared member who maintains and projects values that perpetuate the system.

On Campus

Current data seem to indicate a positive relationship between the numbers of Black faculty at predominantly White institutions and recruitment, admissions, and graduation rates of Black students (Buckley 1980; Livingston & Stewart 1987). A commonly cited factor was the belief that the presence of Black faculty and their availability to serve as role models was critical to the student's success. According to Thoreau, "people will be what they see;" That analogy could be drawn to support the notion Black students need to see black faculty and role models in positions of authority and influence in the workplace and education. There are at this time too few minority faculty to make a significant impact on university functions.

Current Efforts

Some institutions have designed a blueprint for relationships that enhance diversity; a major component being faculty exchanges. Other school have similar programs that support minorities into professional careers. These programs are sanctioned by the top administration and supported with committed resources.

In a study of nursing students at a predominantly Black college intervention designed for state board exam preparation and improving overall academic performance showed that a combined cooperative learning approach was effective over single approach of instruction in test-taking skills, or no specifically designed approach. The large effect present in this study warrants further exploration. Perhaps something in the intensity of the

relationships associated with the cooperative learning activity is an important variable with minority students (Frierson 1987). The suggestion is that attention, support and caring from faculty may be as important as subject content. Faculty in this sense are mentoring.

Are minorities being sponsored and recommended past entry level positions? When someone manages to get past that point, to what can we attribute it? Looking at the low tenure rate for minority faculty are they being caught in the "revolving door?" How many find themselves in inhospitable environments, but stay for myriad of reasons; sheer determination, family/personal factors, or the fear that the next place might be even worse. Highly qualified people miss out on opportunities because they have no access, no networks, no sponsor. Mentoring is not just an effective tool for the recruitment and retention of minorities it is an essential tool if we are to realize the full potential of those who have the ability and desire, but lack belief that it is within their grasp.

Faculty cannot increase unless student admissions increase; most importantly, these students must be able to navigate and survive to graduation. While schools do give lip service to recruitment of minority students and faculty, not as much consideration is given to what happens once they are on campus. It is politically correct to espouse equal opportunity and cultural diversity but the realities on campus leave much to be desired. There are studies (Fleming 1986) and data of an anecdotal nature to indicate the many factors that contribute to the admission-graduation gap, and the high dropout rate. Although minorities are sought after and recruited, it may be difficult to survive and develop professionally in an atmosphere where there may not be a true commitment toward that end. A recent survey of Black

nursing faculty (Allen, Steele 1987) study showed that most Black were located in the South and Southeast, where there are still several traditionally all Black schools. Most had been in their present job 6 years or less, were at assistant professor rank, and untenured. Those tenured were more often at the historically Black institutions (44%). In a breakdown of tenure, non-tenure, and non-tenure track, most non-tenure track positions among those surveyed were held by Blacks at White institutions.

Within this same study were indications that minority faculty members did not feel that they had been properly socialized or fully integrated into the academic environment at their institution. They reported an alarming lack of participation or inclusion in those scholarly activities which are required for survival and progression in academia. Absence from the network of scholars certainly has to be related to the low numbers of minority faculty who are tenured, or at senior rank. Faculty have accepted the inevitability of doctoral degree requirements in university but here again minorities are at considerable risk and disadvantage. Without fellowships and/or scholarships, and they often are, it is necessary to work full-time. Contact with degree granting institution may be such that they miss the close support and guidance necessary to become involved.

There are aspects of the minority experience in graduate education that may have long-lasting and far-reaching negatives. Aside from the academic rigor contacts are made and relationships formed that affect the professional future. It is absolutely essential to network. Information is often passed in loops that too often do not include minority students. Why they are usually outside the loop is another issue. But it is necessary to adopt positive strategies to overcome it.

Socialization as scholars requires collaboration; one of the many supports that mentoring provides. When experienced academics include graduate students on projects it helps to transmit the essence of the theory that is applied in practice. From a practitioner the novice gets a sense of what is expected of him. Unfortunately some faculty who had to walk the mine field by themselves feel they are not in a position to mentor the minority students they encounter.

There have been studies showing that those who were mentors themselves are more likely to mentor others. Whether this relates to individual feelings of insecurity, personality, or competence warrants further study. Psychosocial functions of mentoring re those that enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity and effectiveness in a professional role. Included among them are role modeling, counseling, acceptance, confirmation and friendship (Kram 1985). Generally these depend on the quality of the relationships and the underlying bond. Role modeling is the most frequently cited psychosocial function. While all role models are not mentors, there is something modeled by all mentors that is worthy of emulation.

Students Speak

A fall 1991 survey of students at a medium sized university in the Midwest asked students what kinds of support they believed to be most important. The choices were, in order selected:

1) Help me to learn about college life.
2) Listen when I need someone to talk to.
3) Provide companionship.
4) Help me with homework.
5) Other.

Response to item asking for satisfaction with social support:

Very - 18%

Somewhat - 71%

Not at all - 11%

How important is it to you to have a minority instructor?

Very - 60%

Somewhat - 34%

Not at all - 6%

A final open ended question "What do you feel is the most important a thing for Black faculty to do?" drew varied responses that said mainly:

1) Be visible.

2) Be supportive.

3) Be involved.

Most students could not name three of the approximately 14 full time minority faculty: At this time there are no faculty involved significantly in psychosocial or cognitive support activities.

Approximately 10% of the undergraduate Black students were randomly selected. 58% were juniors and seniors; 42% freshmen/sophomores. By gender 51% female, 39% males. Most students approached were eager to respond and elaborate on questionnaire items. One student worker refused, stating a distrust of questionnaires.

The university was established in 1873 but Blacks have attended only since the 60's. It is located in a region that though midwestern is southern and rural in cultural orientation to a great degree. A June 1989 article in the state's largest daily reported that statewide there was one program for recruitment and retention of minorities making it 32 of 33 states surveyed.

Efforts began at that time to improve the situation. Currently about 7% of student body are Black, and there are a considerable number of international students. A program of peer assistance was begun in 1990 of fall. This consists of upper class students assigned to incoming freshmen. There is no structured mechanism for faculty involvement at this time.

Creating a Favorable Environment Summary

Institutions and their representatives must respond with measures that encourage and allow minorities to become involved in all aspects of the creative processes leading to academic and professional advancement. There is consensus that mentoring is multidimensional, but more analysis of factors and study of variables is needed to provide the necessary linkages that are preliminary to a theoretical construct. Specifically; what works when, and with whom, and under what circumstances.

In reviewing the available literature it did not appear that many schools promoted mentoring as part of the institutional role function of faculty.

Students need psychological nourishment and support. There is no doubt that given the current zeitgeist minority students may present at risk, or become so during their matriculation. Many are returning adult learners who are sometimes overwhelmed by things like difficult coursework, need for quiet study time, and other pressures related to economics and family situations. The stressors easily become manageable. They need to be shown convincingly that it can be done.

At certain key points students and faculty alike need role models and polestars to see, fix on and with which to identify. There also comes a time when intercession and intervention are needed. Although the number of minorities in prominent positions are few, that is no reason not to do more.

It may not be feasible to attempt 1:1 intense mentorship for all students and faculty but using the principles of multiple mentors, or diffuse mentorship, we as minorities have to try. We know that here are problems external to us, severe and longstanding, but as surely as we own that there is a problem, we must take responsibility to do what we can with it. Mentoring deserves a chance.

From successful models we should identify specifically what assistance was offered, the nature of the relationship, and timing and duration. Whatever turn the research takes we now that something must be done. Considering the past and the present situations, we do not dare not try.

B. Stage PhD
Assoc. Prof Nursing

REFERENCES

Allen, B. & Steele, R. (1988). The mentoring role of Black nursing faculty in schools of nursing. Paper presented at conference. "Mentoring students: Creating success through caring." Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Buckley, J. (1990). Faculty commitment to recruitment and retention of Black students. Nursing Outlook, 28, 46-50.

Collins, E. & Scott, P. (1978). Everyone who makes it has a mentor. Harvard Business Review, 56, 89-101.

Frierson, Henry. (1987, Spring). Academic performance in predominantly Black nursing classes: Effects associated with intervention designed for standardized test preparation. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 20(3), 37-40.

Kram, K. (1985). Mentoring at work: Developing relationships in organizational life. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.

Levinson, D. (1978). The seasons of a man's life. New York: Knopf.

Zey, M. (1984). The mentor connection. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin.